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CAMPGROUNDS IN THE NATIONAL FORESTS

Radio talk by A. G. Lindh, Chief of the Division of Land Acquisition, in the National Farm and Home Hour, July 23, 1937.

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If you've ever looked into the mystic, changing heart of a campfire, you'll recall memories that seemed to go back to long ago. Campfires cast a spell - that brings a man back again - back to the forest.

The United States Forest Service has learned in the last few years that camping as a typically American form of recreation is very definitely established and must be given a large part in the plans for administering the National Forests. Last year nearly 2 1/2 million people camped and another 7 million picnicked in the 160 National Forests covering 174 millions of acres located in 40 states, Alaska and Puerto Rico; which, by the way, makes a pretty fair-sized set of playgrounds.

The number of campers and picnickers doubled in the last 10 years and most of the increase came during the depression. When the family purse got thin folks seemed to wake up to the free campgrounds and other free recreation of the National Forests, and to the realization that the National Forests belong to all the people. Now, no matter how fat the family purse becomes, there is every sign that the use of the forests for camping will continue to increase. With more campers coming the rangers and fireguards had to prepare many more campgrounds and then the CCC boys have helped a mighty lot. Now there are nearly 6000 improved campgrounds on the 160 National Forests.

Campgrounds are developed as a part of the plan of making the National Forests useful in every one of the many ways that forests can be used. For example, one of the chief purposes of the forest you visit may be to increase water absorption and hold the soil back from washing down into reservoirs, stream channels and irrigation ditches. Such use does not prevent using the forest for camping and other kinds of recreation.

There will be logging operations and stock-grazing. But these uses of the forest are planned to avoid damage to the campgrounds and their surroundings.

The use of the forests for timber production and stock-grazing is necessary to the local and the national economy. Areas as vast as the National Forests could not be closed to commercial uses without crippling the economic life of the communities in and near them, and without seriously reducing the national income.

So, if you're travelling on a mountain road this summer, and chance to catch up with a band of sheep headed for their national forest summer range, just take it easy. They'll be juicy lamb chops by and by, but for the present put your car in low gear and advance cautiously. They'll gambol about a bit in front of you and close in right behind you. When you finally get through them, you'll understand why sheep herders allegedly all go crazy.

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A large part of the national forests' campgrounds are on highways; convenient for auto-camping. But there are also wilderness camping places on trails miles from any road. They are for people who like to go horse-back or hike far from civilization.

Except in bad fire weather there is no red-tape involved in camping on a National Forest. If the camp is kept clean and the campfire safe you will have complied with the two cardinal rules. Campfire permits are required for the isolated areas. However, there is a complete absence of "No Trespass" signs in the National Forests, except for temporary closures of limited hazardous areas during bad fire weather.

Perhaps you'd like to know what an improved campground contains. Nearly always you'll find sanitation facilities, campstoves or fireplaces, tables and benches, a safe water supply, cold and sparkling, and a level place for your bed or tent. On some there are playgrounds and swings for the youngsters; on others, community shelters and open air theaters for group entertainment; or there may be still other improvements especially suited to the individual areas.

Campground developments are kept simple - so as not to detract from the beauty of the surroundings. After all, we go camping for peace and a rest from the feverish life of our civilization. At night you won't need any sleeping potions. One of those garrulous pine squirrels may berate you for stopping, and a camp robber - brazen little bird - may drop down on a low limb to cast an impudent beady eye around for crumbs, but otherwise nothing will disturb you. And when the evening campfire flickers light up the friendly tree trunks in the deepening shadows, the land is so full of hush you can almost hear the trees saying their prayers.

There are many thousands of square miles of little explored country to lure the adventurous and miles of open roads and trails for the more conservative.

The highways and byways through the National Forests are pleasant drives. The peace and quiet is said to even have a soothing effect on back seat drivers.

The lakes and streams haven't been spoiled. Most of them are full of husky trout; within their range big snowy geese drop in twice a year; ducks find safety and nesting grounds; deer, elk and moose slip down to drink each evening; in the gray light of morning an old she-bear may teach her young son the art of fishing. Not all of the species of wildlife are found in any one National Forest but each forest usually has an abundance of the species native to that country.

Most of the National Forests are in the high mountains; mountains that, when you look up from your camp in the moonlight, seem close to God.

If you're lucky enough during this season, now at hand, to have two weeks of camping, and find that ideal spot that's awaiting all of us somewhere, you'll hate to leave -- you'll want to linger.

Whether you have a simple camping outfit or an elaborate one doesn't matter. The smell of the woods is just as sweet and your appetite gets just as sharp, whether you're sleeping on a patented device or a bed of pine needles.

There is a National Forest within less than a day's drive of every home in America today. You may write to the Forest Supervisor of the National Forest you're interested in, for information, or, you may write to the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture, in Washington, D. C.

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